

# Choosing a Safe and Successful Weight-loss Program



U.S. DEPARTMENT  
OF HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES

**WIN** *Weight-control Information Network*

## A Responsible and Safe Weight-loss Program

Experts agree that the best way to reach a healthy weight is to follow a sensible eating plan and engage in regular physical activity. Weight-loss programs should encourage healthy behaviors that help you lose weight and that you can maintain over time. Safe and effective weight-loss programs should include:

- ☐ Healthy eating plans that reduce calories but do not rule out specific foods or food groups
- ☐ Regular physical activity and/or exercise instruction
- ☐ Tips on healthy behavior changes that also consider your cultural needs
- ☐ Slow and steady weight loss of about ½ to 2 pounds per week and not more than 3 pounds per week (weight loss may be faster at the start of a program)
- ☐ Medical care if you are planning to lose weight by following a special formula diet, such as a very-low-calorie diet
- ☐ A plan to keep the weight off after you have lost it

## Ask Questions

Gather as much information as you can before deciding to join a program. Providers of weight-loss programs should be able to answer these questions:

- What does the weight-loss program consist of?
- What are the staff qualifications?
- Does the product or program carry any risks?
- How much does the program cost?
- What results do participants typically have?

Choosing a weight-loss program may be a difficult task. You may not know what to look for in a weight-loss program or what questions to ask. This fact sheet can help you make an informed decision about joining a program.



## **What does the weight-loss program consist of?**

- ☐ Does the program offer individual counseling and/or group classes?
- ☐ Do you have to follow a specific meal plan or keep food records?
- ☐ Do you have to purchase special food, drugs, or supplements?
- ☐ Does the program encourage you to be physically active, follow a specific physical activity plan, or provide exercise instruction?
- ☐ Does the program provide information on how to make positive and healthy behavior changes?
- ☐ Is the program sensitive to your lifestyle and cultural needs?

## **What are the staff qualifications?**

- ☐ Who supervises the program?
- ☐ What type of weight management training, experience, education, and certifications does the staff have?

## **Does the product or program carry any risks?**

- ☐ Are there risks related to following the program's eating or exercise plans?
- ☐ Are there risks related to using recommended drugs or supplements?
- ☐ Do participants talk with a medical professional?
- ☐ Does a medical professional oversee the program?
- ☐ Will the program providers work with your personal health care provider if you have a medical condition or are taking prescribed medications?

## **How much does the program cost?**

- ☐ What is the total cost of the program?
- ☐ Are there recurring costs such as weekly attendance fees, costs of food and supplement purchases, etc?
- ☐ Are there additional fees for a follow-up program or to re-enter the program for follow-up after you lose weight?
- ☐ Are there additional fees for medical tests?

## **What results do participants typically have?**

- ☐ How much weight does an average participant lose and how long have they kept off all or part of their weight?
- ☐ Can the program provide references?

If you are interested in locating a weight-loss program in your area, ask your health care provider for a referral or contact your local hospital. For additional general information, contact:

Weight-control Information Network (WIN)

1 WIN Way

Bethesda, MD 20892-3665

Toll-free: 1-877-9464627

Tel: (202) 828-1025

Fax: (202) 828-1028

Email: [WIN@info.niddk.nih.gov](mailto:WIN@info.niddk.nih.gov)

[www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/nutrit.htm](http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/nutrit.htm)

These brochures from WIN offer more information on weight-loss programs, healthy eating, and physical activity:

*Active at Any Size*

*Very Low Calorie Diets*

*Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan: Better Health and You* (available in English and Spanish)

## Additional Resources

Federal Trade Commission

Consumer Response Center

600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20580

Local Tel: 202-FTC-HELP (382-4357)

Toll-free: 1-877-382-4357

Web: [www.consumer.gov/health.htm](http://www.consumer.gov/health.htm)

International Food Information Council Foundation

1100 Connecticut Avenue, Suite 430

Washington, DC 20036

Tel: 202-296-6540

Web: <http://ific.org>

Partnership for Healthy Weight Management

Web: [www.consumer.gov/weightloss/](http://www.consumer.gov/weightloss/)

For the Partnership for Healthy Weight Management publication *Weight Loss: Finding a Weight Loss Program that Works for You*, go to [www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/health/wgtloss.pdf](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/health/wgtloss.pdf)



National Institute of Diabetes and  
Digestive and Kidney Diseases

NIH Publication No. 03-3700  
May 2003

## Weight-control Information Network

1 WIN WAY

BETHESDA, MD 20892-3665

Phone: (202) 828-1025

Toll-free number:  
1-877-946-4627

FAX: (202) 828-1028

Email: [WIN@info.niddk.nih.gov](mailto:WIN@info.niddk.nih.gov)

Internet: [www.niddk.nih.gov/  
health/nutrit/nutrit.htm](http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/nutrit.htm)

The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a national service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases of the National Institutes of Health, which is the Federal Government's lead agency responsible for biomedical research on nutrition and obesity. Authorized by Congress (Public Law 103-43), WIN provides the general public, health professionals, the media, and Congress with up-to-date, science-based health information on weight control, obesity, physical activity, and related nutritional issues.

WIN answers inquiries, develops and distributes publications, and works closely with professional and patient organizations and Government agencies to coordinate resources about weight control and related issues.

Publications produced by WIN are reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts.

*This publication is not copyrighted. WIN encourages users of this fact sheet to duplicate and distribute as many copies as desired.*

This fact sheet is also available at [www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/nutrit.htm](http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/nutrit.htm).